

**POLITICAL MATURITY IN LATIN AMERICA**

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### POLITICAL MATURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin America in recent years has exhibited an encouraging trend towards constitutional government and democracy. Dictators of the traditional type have rapidly been disappearing--Peron (Argentina), Odría (Peru), Perez (Venezuela), Magloire (Haiti), Rojas (Colombia) and Batista (Cuba).

Equally heartening are the signs that Latin military forces are accepting the idea that politics is the domain of civilians. The immediate successors of Peron and Rojas were military juntas. But these, instead of seeking to retain power indefinitely, held it only during a transitional period and then turned over the government to constitutionally elected presidents. Only a few years ago in Brazil, the threat by a military faction to prevent a free presidential action was swiftly crushed by other officers, headed by the Minister of War, who announced that they would not permit the will of the electorate to be thwarted.

When Perez was overthrown in Venezuela, the army--the traditional focus of power--allowed an essentially civilian junta to assume power and later accepted calmly the election of Romulo Betancourt as President. Yet in 1948 the army had staged a coup because it objected to the existence of a government controlled by Betancourt's Democratic Action Party.

Betancourt's election also was notable in that the political group in control since Perez' ouster accepted its defeat by Betancourt in good grace instead of trying to remain in power by resorting to revolution. In recent years Presidents Prado of Peru and Ydigoras of Guatemala have also assumed office without incident after defeating official government candidates at the polls.

This growing political maturity has recently been coupled with signs that Latin American leaders are becoming increasingly aware of the true nature and danger of Communism. This development is especially welcome to the Free World since Communism has undoubtedly made large gains in the area in recent years. Although the Party exists legally

only in Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela, it is active in every country, either clandestinely or disguised by some cover name such as Partido del Pueblo in Panama and Partido Vanguardia Popular in Costa Rica.

Although the Latin Communist Parties, whether legal or illegal, are all comparatively small in numbers, party membership is a misleading clue to their real strength and influence. Much effective work can be, and is, carried out through controlled labor unions and a large variety of front groups. Both the parties and the fronts can count on material and financial support from the Soviets and the international Communist movement. As a result, each local party constitutes a potential danger far greater than its size suggests.

In Latin America, as in other underdeveloped areas, the Soviet Union and its satellites have been working hard to expand trade and thus increase their influence and prestige in still another direction. Since every Latin country desires rapid economic development and industrialization, which requires capital and credits, the Soviet trade offensive has had considerable success. Offers of long-term credit at 2.5 percent have seemed too good to reject.

Latin America's trade problems have helped the Reds. The Latin countries have traditionally depended on the export of one or several basic commodities such as copper, wool, coffee and bananas. A dwindling world market for these goods coupled with falling prices and overproduction has caused serious difficulties. The Soviets have taken advantage of the situation by offering to accept these goods at premium prices in exchange for desired manufactures and industrial products of good quality at low prices in order to entice trade into the Red orbit by attractive terms. The record shows, however, that trade with the Communists ceases to be attractive once a country has irrevocably been drawn into the Red net.

The Latin American countries are apparently becoming aware of this fact, and the Communist gains have recently shown signs of coming to a halt. Country after country has awakened to the danger of doing any kind of business with the Communists and to the subversive and divisive efforts of the Soviets and their local minions.

In Argentina, President Frondizi, although elected with the help of Communist votes, on 7 April ordered the ouster of four Soviet and one Rumanian diplomats upon obtaining proof that they had been inciting strikes. On 27 April this was followed by a decree banning all activity by the Communist Party and associated groups and closing down the Party organ La Hora and other leftist publications. On 17 May, the Federal police closed and seized the files and propaganda materials of 20 front organizations.

Despite its shaky economy, moreover, Argentina some months ago began to reduce its trade with the USSR, stopping contracted oil purchases altogether. Of a \$100,000,000 credit extended by the Soviets, Argentina has only used about \$25 million and shows signs of letting the remainder lie unused.

Following the expulsion of the Red diplomats from Argentina, Brazilian authorities immediately began to investigate possible Soviet instigation of the current strike wave in that country. Col. Danilo Nunes, chief of the political police, declared he was personally convinced that the strikes were Communist-inspired. The police, in fact, have obtained a Russian-language document outlining Red plans to organize Brazil's bank workers.

Like Argentina, Brazil, although needing credits, has shown itself wary of the lavish Soviet aid offers, including one for oil development.

Soviet complicity in labor agitation has also come to light in Mexico where, on 1 April, the government expelled two Soviet diplomats for having arranged and financed (\$80,000) the Railway Workers' Union attempt to paralyze the nation's transport system by an illegal strike on Easter Sunday. Subsequent anti-Communist action by the government has included police raids on Party headquarters throughout the country.

Some organizations, for example, the Nationalist Party and the Knights of Columbus, complained that the mere expulsion of two diplomats was not a sufficient answer to such blatant Soviet interference in Mexican affairs, and they advocated outright severance of diplomatic relations. This idea was supported by the influential Chilean paper El Mercurio, which urged all Latin American states to

follow Mexico's example in getting rid of "undesirable elements." In Uruguay, the newspaper El Dia reported that the Uruguayan Government was reviewing its relations with Russia and considering breaking them.

Other reports indicate that the Uruguayan Government, even if it does not sever relations, will definitely curb the activities of the local Soviet Embassy which, despite the small size of the country, is the largest Soviet Embassy in South America. The labor movement also has become more vigilant and has recently broken the Party's long-time hold on the port of Montevideo.

Most encouraging have been recent indications that Communist influence in Cuba, which has been growing rapidly since the ouster of Batista, is now being checked. During his April visit to the US, Castro for the first time declared himself unequivocally opposed to Communism. On 15 May, Revolucion, the official organ of Castro's 26th of July Movement, carried an editorial which bitterly castigated the Communists as "divisionists."

The Party's hold on Cuban labor unions has recently been diminished by a series of defeats in union elections, culminating in the election on 25 May of officers of the sugar workers' union. A subsequent charge by the Party organ Ray that the Communist defeat resulted from "anti-democratic" methods so infuriated the union members that the police felt obliged to guard the newspaper plant lest an attempt be made to burn it. On 23 May, moreover, a group of labor leaders announced formation of a "labor-humanist" front against Communism, claiming the support of at least 29 of Cuba's 33 labor federations.

That the Communists have been hurt by these developments is clear from the angry attack made on 26 May by Blas Roca, Cuban Party Secretary General, against the 26th of July Movement in general and Castro in particular. Roca bitterly denounced the "anti-democratic" nature of the sugar workers' union election as "symptomatic of the new Anti-Communist situation."

Although much still remains to be done before anti-democratic and Communist forces can be considered to have been decisively defeated, the facts outlined above indicate a healthy trend in the right direction. The Free World earnestly hopes that the trend will continue.